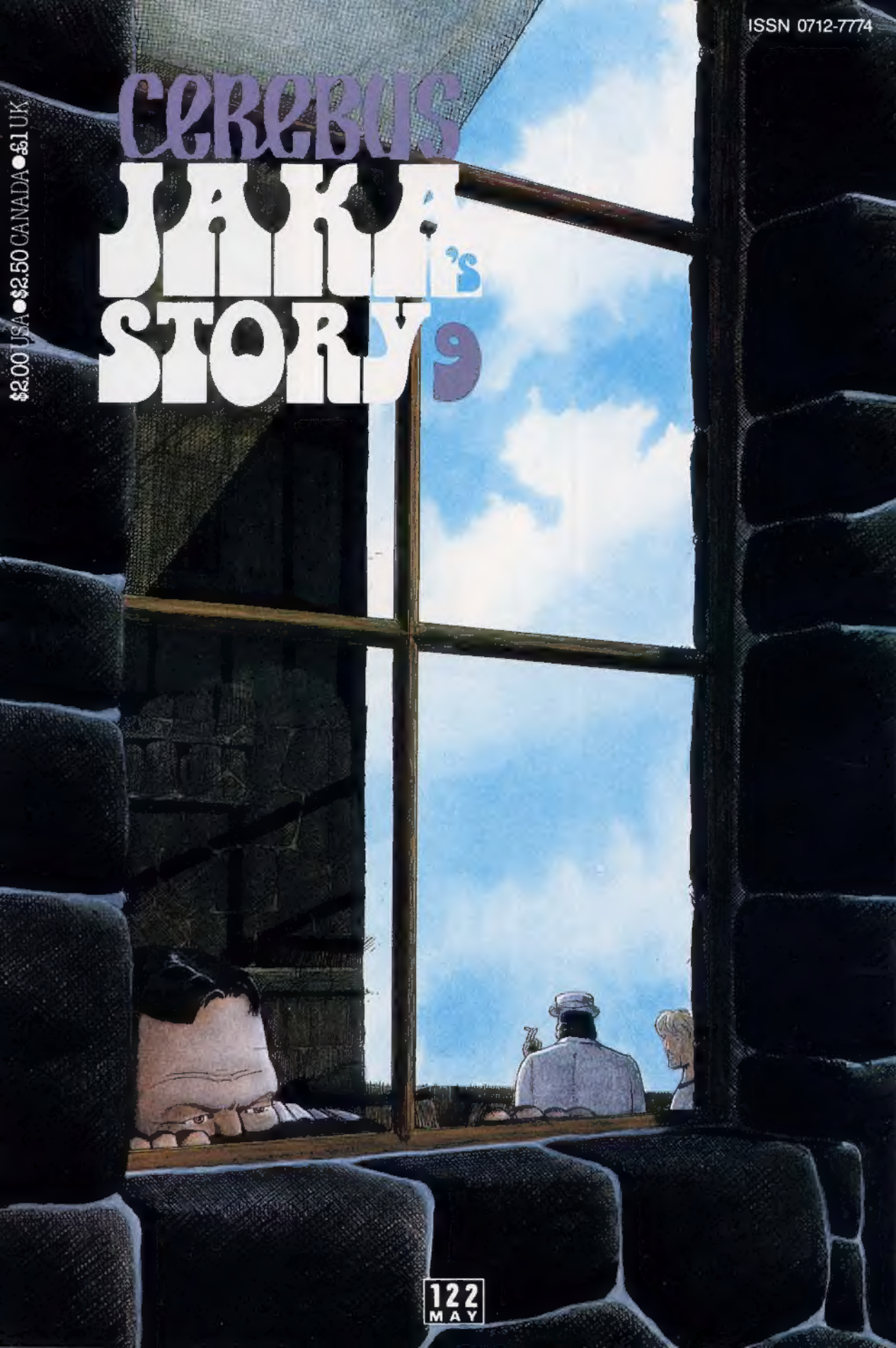
ISSN 0712-7774

CEREBUS

JAKA'S STORY 9

$2.00 USA • $2.50 CANADA • £1 UK



122
MAY

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Hey! Guess who just broke up with his girlfriend?

Dave and Gerhard will be attending the SCAM (Strip Cartoons & Associated Media) Convention August 12th, 13th in Conventry, England. For further information contact Paul Duncan at 011-44 203 257-221.

CEREBUS

NO. 122 MAY 1989

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

MONIQUE KAPTEIN
Administrative Assistant

Circulation
25,500

JAKA'S STORY
a novel

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PROLOGUE
(Cerebus 114)

•

POGROM'S PROGRESS
(Cerebus 115 to Cerebus 119)

•

THE POET
(Cerebus 120 to Cerebus 130)

•

MYSTERY ACHIEVEMENT
(Cerebus 131 to Cerebus 136)

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PRINTED IN CANADA

THEY CAN'T JUST READ A BOOK...
THEY HAVE TO PICK EVERY WORD OUT WITH TWEEZERS AND EXAMINE IT UNDER A
I'M SORRY, PUD. I HAVE TO LEAVE EARLY AGAIN.
I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.
OF COURSE MISS JAKA. I'LL GET YOUR MONEY FOR YOU
I'LL GET THE MONEY TOMORROW, PUD. OKAY? I REALLY HAVE TO RUN
YES MISS JAKA.

Miss Jaka?

Yes, Pud?

My wife...she died just about a year ago.

Oh, Pud, I'm so sorry...I didn't know...

That's okay, Miss Jaka. She went peacefully and there wasn't much pain. Praise Tarim.

Praise Tarim.

But I'm all alone in the world, now, Miss Jaka. Whenever I think of her it's like a...pain,...inside me.

Oh, Pud.

Like I'm hollow inside and just filled with pain. And I remember how she used to put her arms around me when I was in pain and hold my head against her ripe, full

And I remember how she used to put her arms around me when I was in pain

Oh, Pud.

Now there's no one to put their arms around me, Miss Jaka. No one to ease my pain.

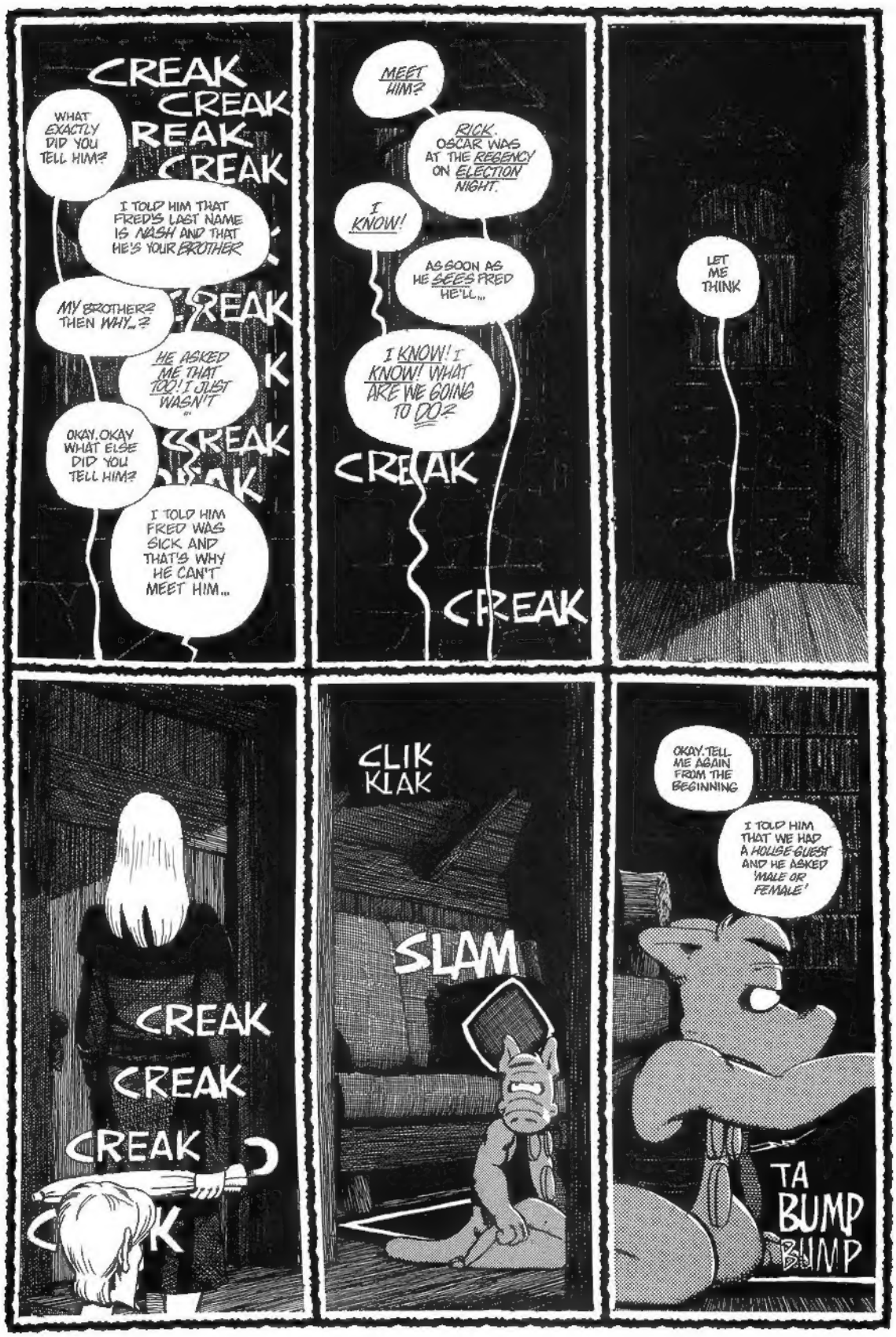
And I remember how she used to put her arms around me when I was in pain

Oh, Pud.

I know it's a lot to ask, Miss Jaka but could you...would you?

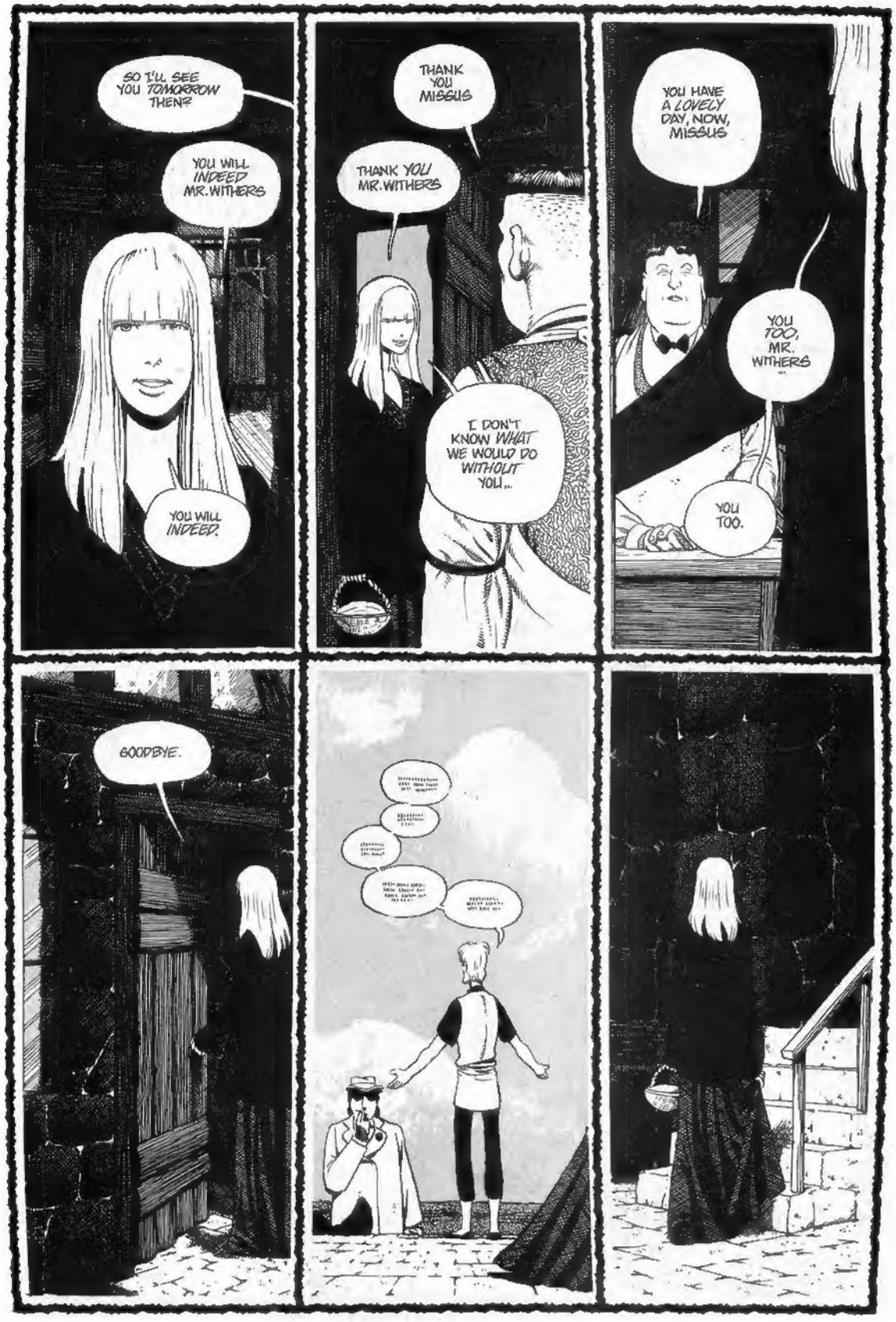
Would I what, Pud?

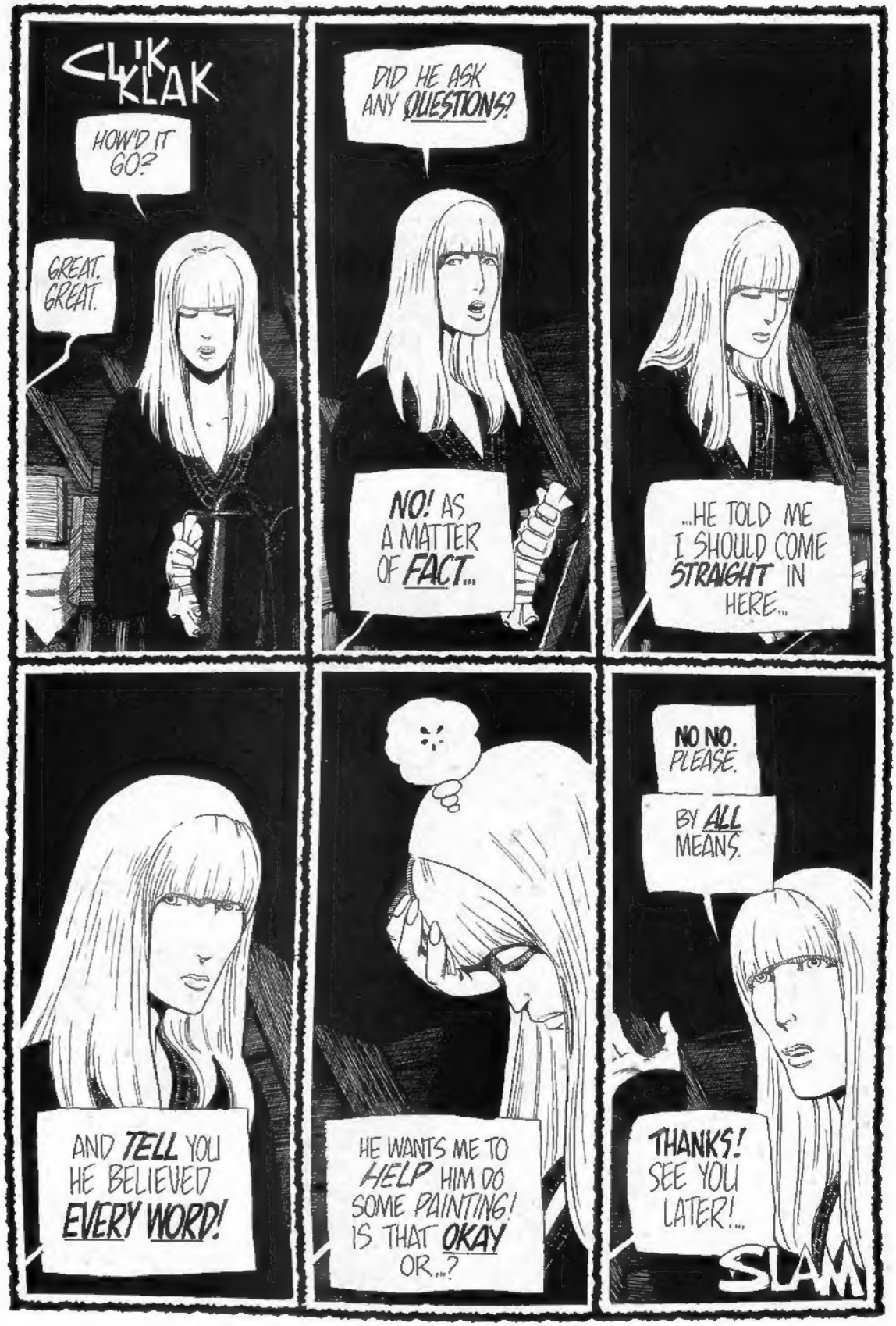
Just put your arms around my head and hold me tight. It might help...ease...the pain.


CREAK
CREAK
REAK
CREAK
WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU TELL HIM?
I TOLD HIM THAT FRED'S LAST NAME IS NASH AND THAT HE'S YOUR BROTHER
MY BROTHER? THEN WHY... ?
HE ASKED ME THAT TOO! I JUST WASN'T
OKAY. OKAY WHAT ELSE DID YOU TELL HIM?
I TOLD HIM FRED WAS SICK AND THAT'S WHY HE CAN'T MEET HIM...
MEET HIM?
RICK. OSCAR WAS AT THE REGENCY ON ELECTION NIGHT.
I KNOW!
AS SOON AS HE SEES FRED HE'LL...
I KNOW! I KNOW! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?
CREAK
CREAK
LET ME THINK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CLIK
KLAK
SLAM
OKAY. TELL ME AGAIN FROM THE BEGINNING
I TOLD HIM THAT WE HAD A HOUSE GUEST AND HE ASKED 'MALE OR FEMALE'
TA
BUMP
BUMP

SHE CLOSED THE door quietly, carefully, until she heard the final and irrevocable click of the bolt as it found, again, its home in the Hidden Door's frame; felt the penetrating cold of the tarnished metal plate through the tip of her right, index finger and the nail of her right thumb. Profound sadness welled up within her, surging, strengthening, even as her heart sank to greet it. With eyes closed and the darkness within both seen and felt, her unhappiness seemed a quite tangible thing; black, overwhelming and pitiless. Not for the first time in her young life, a part of her contemplated Tarim and His Infinite Mercies and found them wanting.

MRS. NASH.
OSCAR.
TING TING CLATING
CLIC CLAK
MORNING, OSCAR
GOOD MORNING RICHARD. IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY ISN'T IT?
SURE IS.
OH BY THE WAY-- DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN I WAS TALKING ABOUT JAKE'S BROTHER, FRED?
VAGUELY...


SO I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW THEN?
YOU WILL INDEED MR. WITHERS
YOU WILL INDEED.
THANK YOU MISSUS
THANK YOU MR. WITHERS
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE WOULD DO WITHOUT YOU...
YOU HAVE A LOVELY DAY, NOW, MISSUS
YOU TOO, MR. WITHERS
YOU TOO.
GOODBYE.

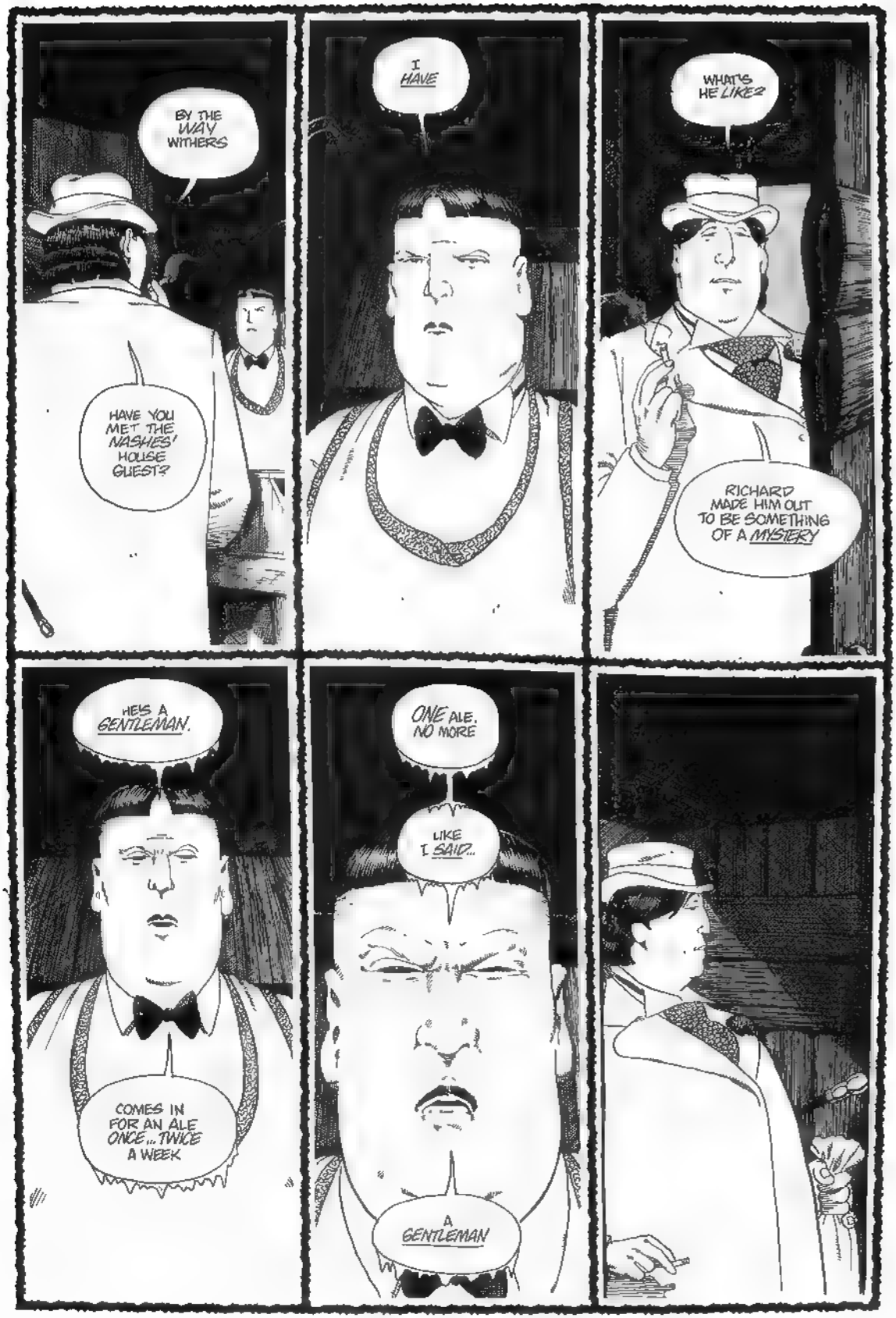

CLIK KLAK
HOW'D IT GO?
GREAT. GREAT.
DID HE ASK ANY QUESTIONS?
NO! AS A MATTER OF FACT...
...HE TOLD ME I SHOULD COME STRAIGHT IN HERE...
AND TELL YOU HE BELIEVED EVERY WORD!
HE WANTS ME TO HELP HIM DO SOME PAINTING! IS THAT OKAY OR...?
NO NO. PLEASE.
BY ALL MEANS.
THANKS! SEE YOU LATER!...
SLAM

IT WAS THE SOUND of Nurse's footsteps from somewhere beyond the worn threshold of the Locked Door which roused Jaka from the funereal reverie in which she found herself. The moment stretched unnaturally as reality, returning to her, slowed; distorted itself; so that each reverberating tread seemed to hang, poised and ominous within her.

It was already too late.

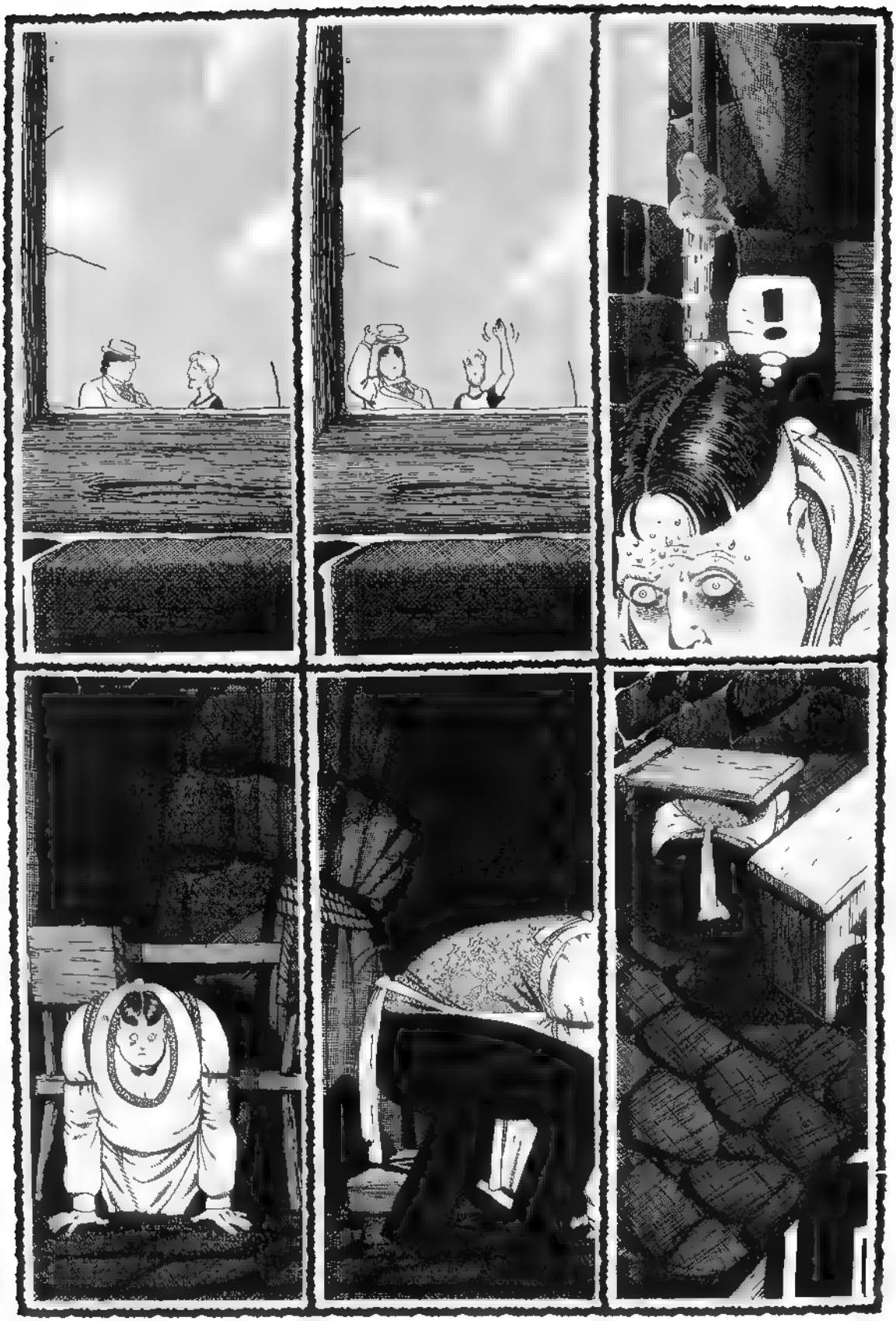
Simultaneous with that thought, (and in her haste), she stepped from her shoe; as if her right foot were a spectral thing, uninhibited by natural laws and restraints. Muscles taut and with long and incautious strides, she hurled herself in the direction of the Locked Door.

MORNING, WITHERS.
I FIND MYSELF IN NEED OF A JAR OF PAINT THINNER
AH SPLENDID
AMID ALL THESE SHORTAGES AS WELL..
SIXTY COPPER BITS
OR HALF A CROWN.
HEAVENS.
EVERYTHING IS BECOMING SO DEAR NOWADAYS
HERE'S A CROWN
KEEP THE CHANGE


BY THE WAY WITHERS
HAVE YOU MET THE NASHES' HOUSE GUEST?
I HAVE
WHAT'S HE LIKE?
RICHARD MADE HIM OUT TO BE SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY
HE'S A GENTLEMAN.
COMES IN FOR AN ALE ONCE... TWICE A WEEK
ONE ALE. NO MORE
LIKE I SAID...
A GENTLEMAN

YES.
WELL
AS EVER WITHERS ...
IT'S BEEN AN ABSOLUTE CHORE
ADIEU, WITHERS ADIEU
TING TING TING
PLEASE DON'T TROUBLE YOURSELF. I KNOW MY WAY OUT...
TING TING
CLIK KLAK

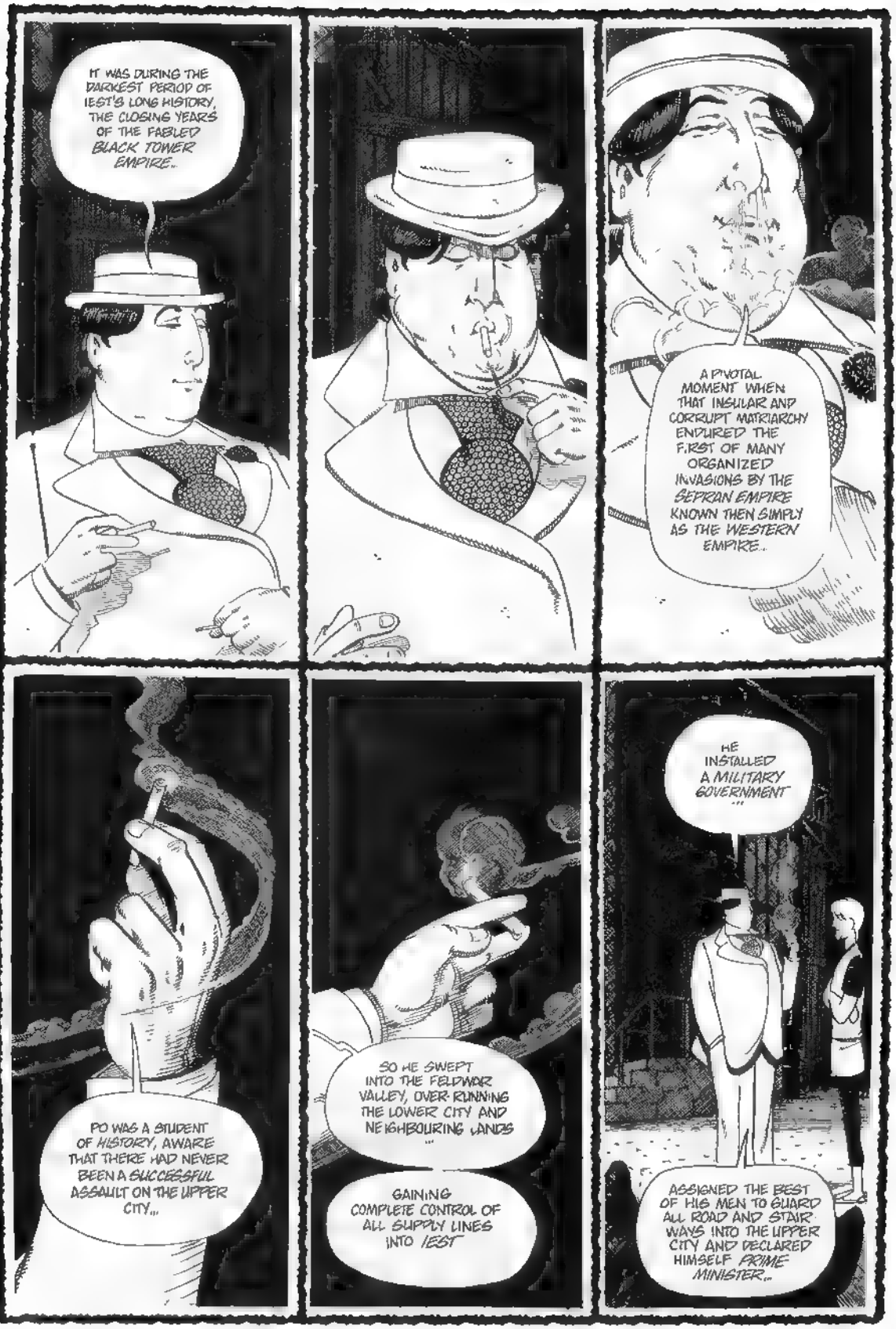
IN THAT EXACT instant of her arrival, as she gripped the antiquitous door-handle in her left hand, pulling down until the bolt leapt, quickly, quietly, into the hidden recesses of the Locked Door, the door to Nurse's bedroom opened. Even as she swung the door closed, Jaka could see the outline of her guardian in stark contrast to the surrounding ornate Shen wallpaper The silhouette grew; looming; threatening; consuming avariciously the few patches of daylight which remained. In the next instant, with a slight noise more felt than heard, the door was secure and the bolt released.



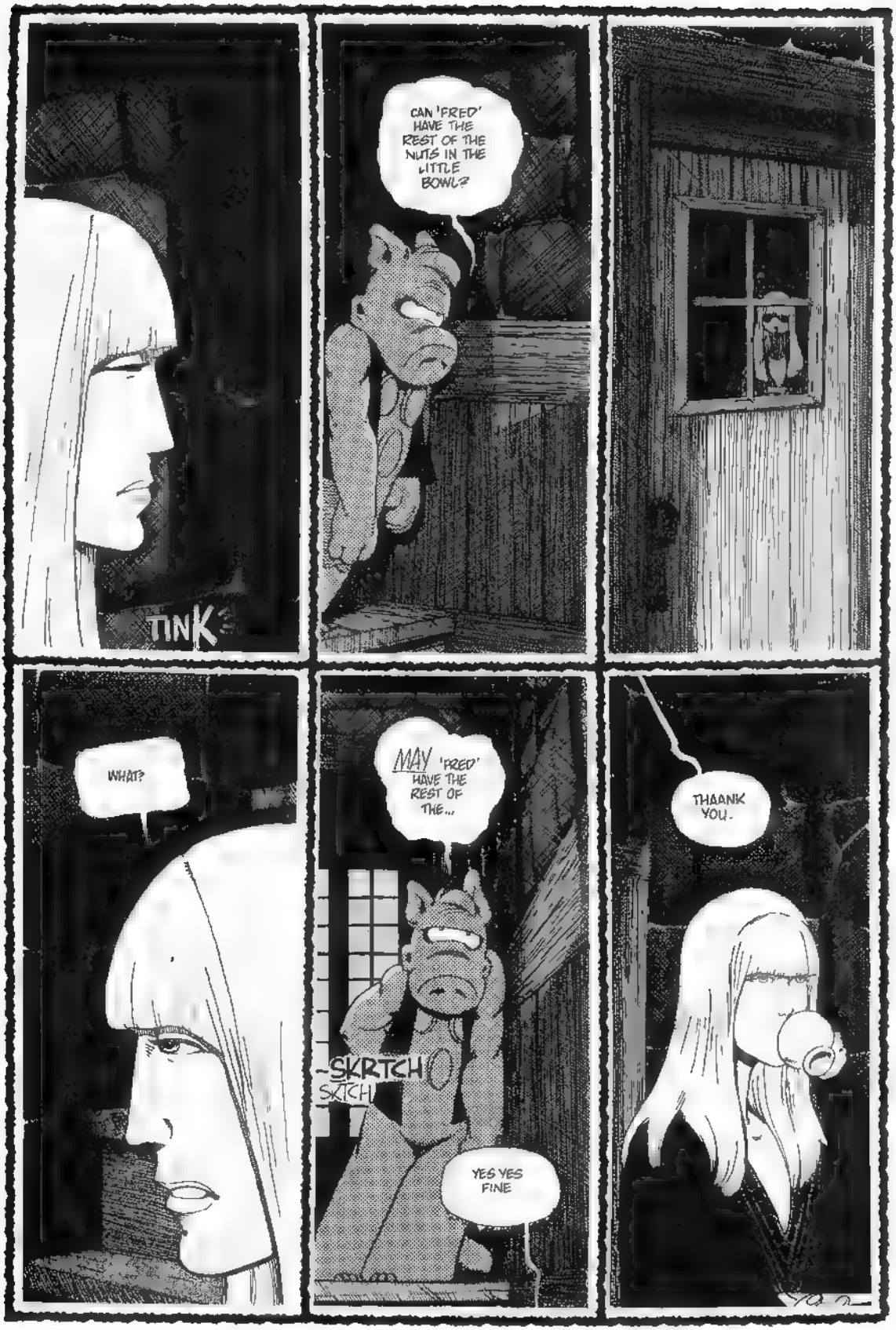
...A GUFFIN!
THE WORD ITSELF IS A BASTARDIZATION OF GAE PHAEN... LITERALLY 'GOOD LUCK.' IN THE ORIGINAL PICT...
GUFFINS WERE AS COMMON AS SPRING BLOSSOMS IN PAGAN IEST... TINY, PERFECT WORKS OF ART
HANDED DOWN FROM MOTHER TO DAUGHTER..
INTRICATELY CARVED FROM WHITE STONES INDIGENOUS TO THE FELD RIVER...
AND DECORATED WITH BLACK PAINT..
TO A DEGREE THEY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIVISION OF THE EASTERN AND WESTERN CHURCHES
REALLY?
HOW?

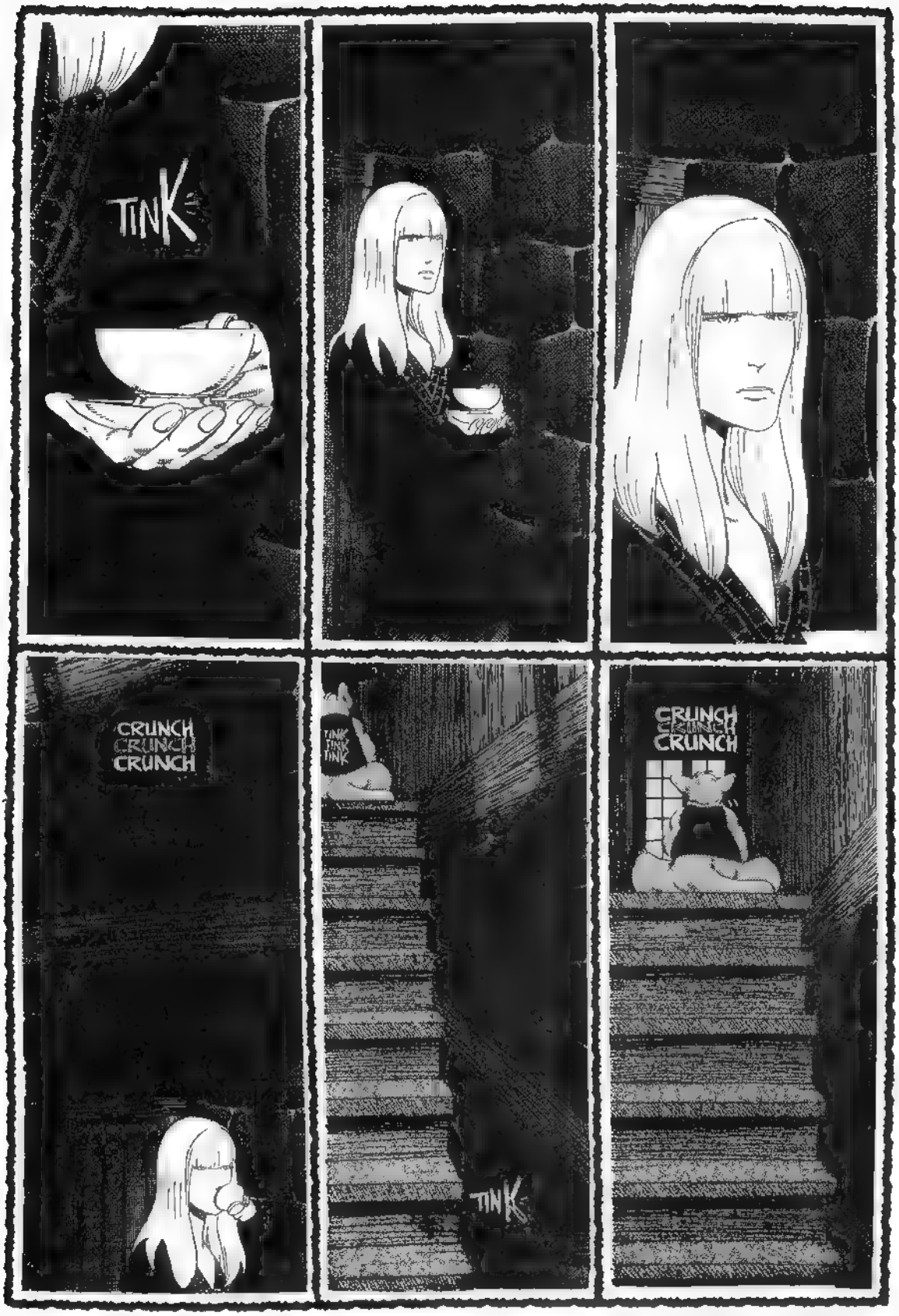
JAKA PRESSED THE door-handle up with all the strength available to her and prayed, in that moment, that blasphemy was within the jurisdiction of Tarim's Infinite Mercies.

Several seconds passed.


IT WAS DURING THE DARKEST PERIOD OF IEST'S LONG HISTORY, THE CLOSING YEARS OF THE FABLED BLACK TOWER EMPIRE..
A PIVOTAL MOMENT WHEN THAT INSULAR AND CORRUPT MATRIARCHY ENDURED THE FIRST OF MANY ORGANIZED INVASIONS BY THE SEPRAN EMPIRE KNOWN THEN SIMPLY AS THE WESTERN EMPIRE..
PO WAS A STUDENT OF HISTORY, AWARE THAT THERE HAD NEVER BEEN A SUCCESSFUL ASSAULT ON THE UPPER CITY..
SO HE SWEPT INTO THE FELDWOR VALLEY, OVER-RUNNING THE LOWER CITY AND NEIGHBOURING LANDS ...
GAINING COMPLETE CONTROL OF ALL SUPPLY LINES INTO IEST
HE INSTALLED A MILITARY GOVERNMENT ...
ASSIGNED THE BEST OF HIS MEN TO GUARD ALL ROAD AND STAIR WAYS INTO THE UPPER CITY AND DECLARED HIMSELF PRIME MINISTER..

HE REIGNED WITHOUT ANY OPPOSITION WHATSOEVER FOR FIFTEEN YEARS
ONE CAN ONLY MARVEL AT THE SIMPLICITY OF HIS SOLUTION. THE WOMEN HAD NEVER LOST CONTROL OF THE IMPREGNABLE UPPER CITY...
SO HE CHOSE TO IGNORE THE UPPER CITY
JUST PRETENDED IT DIDN'T EXIST.
THE MATRIARCHAL DYNASTY HAD LOST FAVOUR WITH THE PEOPLE OF THE LOWER CITY ANYWAY...
HAVING ABANDONED PAGAN RITUALS AS THE OFFICIAL MEANS OF WORSHIP...
INTRODUCED PROHIBITIVE TAX RATES
LOYALTY OATHS


TINK
CAN 'FRED' HAVE THE REST OF THE NUTS IN THE LITTLE BOWL?
WHAT?
MAY 'FRED' HAVE THE REST OF THE...
-SKRTCH
SKTCH
YES YES FINE
THAANK YOU.


TINK
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
TINK
TINK
TINK
TINK
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH

AARDVARK COMMENT

Mr. Sim and Gerhard.

The Cerebus Companion is pretty much done. It's about 100 pages, including twelve pages of glossary and nine pages of index, but **without artwork.** Here's an outline of the contents:

Introduction
The World of Cerebus – geography and technology of Estarcion
Cerebus the Aardvark – character description
Cerebus the Comic Book
  On the Bookshelf – AV contact info, phonebooks, prices
  In the Archives – *Swords, AV in 3-D, Epic* etc.
Early Cerebus Stories
  The Cast
  Summaries of the early Cerebus Stories
Outtakes from Swords of Cerebus
High Society
  The Cast
  Summary of High Society
Exodus
Church & State
  The Cast
  Summary of Church & State
    Volume 1
    Volume 2
  Postmortem of Church & State
Square One
Jaka's Story
Further Reading
Acknowledgements
The Cerebus Glossary
Index

I am still tweaking the manuscript. It needs a "beta site" (as they say in the computer software business), consisting of at least one outstanding Cerebus fan who is willing to point out omissions (e.g. I only recently heard someone mention that there was a *Cerebus* radio show). I haven't absolutely decided what to do with it once I'm satisfied that it's really done. My current backup plan is to take some copies down to the San Diego comics conference to do some test marketing.

May I have your permission to incorporate some sample panels from various *Cerebus* works into *The Cerebus Companion*? I'm *not* asking you to send me artwork, depending on how well my graphics person thinks she can do, I'd expect just to make reproductions from the Cerebus phonebooks and other material I've acquired. I'd rather not select specific panels until I have at least tentative approval from you. I can tell you that I probably won't use more than twenty. As I mentioned in my previous letter, these would be snapshots of the major characters. Do you have a royalty requirement or policy? I'd also like to use Michael Loubert's map of Estarcion. Would that require separate permission?

As I've continued to write the Companion over these past few weeks, I've thought about why I didn't hear back from you regarding my first letter. It occurred to me that you *might* be more comfortable answering if you knew a little more about what I'm doing and if you knew a bit more about me. I've already given you an outline of the manuscript, so here's a short bio. I'm a computer programmer, sometimes a technical writer. All of my published work to date (a handful of articles and papers, and a dozen or so manuals) has been related to computer science. Writing something like the *Companion* is one of my ideas of fun.

Manuals are dry, dry, dry. The *Companion* too is a bit drier than I originally intended, but that's because in a way, it's another kind of manual. Maybe I should've called it *The Tourist's Guide to Estarcion*. But another idea struck me one night when, after working on the *Companion* for several hours, I switched my monitor over to TV mode to find *The Fly* showing. There was a scene towards the beginning where Jeff Goldblum (the scientist) tells Geena Davis (the reporter), "Please don't publish this story. Right now, you just have bits and pieces; if you're willing to wait, you can do the complete inside story on my work when it's ready." Now, I've tried to write the Companion so that it can't easily be made obsolete by future developments in *Cerebus*, but that means that I've had to restrain myself from writing juicy speculations and from doing much more than "fair witnessing" of the stories. Do you know with certainty where *Cerebus* is going? Is is possible to reverse-engineer your notebooks? Would you be interested in seeing an "inside story" of your work eventually come out in the framework of a more complete *Cerebus Companion*? Is there an inside story to get?

Oh, yeah – I have Canadian postage for you this time.

Ewige Blumenkraft,
Jerry Sweet
6 BayBerry Way
Irvine, CA
92715

While having an author's profound reluctance to have anyone sniffing around my work before it's completed, I am indeed complimented and grateful that someone would go to the trouble that you have.

You have my permission to publish your work so long as it appears with a disclaimer that I have not reviewed it for accuracy and that it should not be viewed as any kind of Cerebus 'bible' but that, much in the spirit of Coles Notes and such-like, it can provide the curious reader with a synopsis to see if Cerebus is or might be to his taste.

I have no idea who to recommend to check your manuscript for inaccuracies. Perhaps an ad in the Buyer's Guide classifieds and you can sort out the chaff from the wheat (or at least those substances which could be deemed 'less chaff-like').

You have my permission to use a single panel (or panel fragment) for each Cast member covered (as well as additional representations for any 'changeable' characters like the various Roaches). These are to be accompanied by ©1989 Dave Sim, of course.

The publication of Michael Loubert's *Aardvarkian Age* map is fine as well.

Good Luck.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr Sim

I am trying to collect the signatures (and work if possible) of noted cartoonists and illustrators. It would give me great pleasure to have you sign the enclosed card for me. I'd be delighted to have you included in my autograph and art collection.

If you have a moment I would be interested to know how you started as a cartoonist and how you came to do comic book art. Art fascinates me and I am always curious to know more about the artist and his work.

I know how busy you must be but I would be grateful if you could answer this request

Thank you for your time, and best wishes for your continued success.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Courtney
P.O. Box 17525
Memphis, TN
38187

You are a charming young lady.

I will be happy to send you my autograph if you will send me a recent photo of yourself.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I got hold of an issue of your absolutely impressing Cerebus -- Comic during my last summer holiday in Edinburgh/Scotland (And I'm not telling you the Comic is great because of a bad conscious, but because I think it really is!). I thought: "Hey, this guy looks pretty much just like the little pig (sic!) we have on our LP cover." I bought the issue (Nr. one twelfe/thirteen), and when I got to read the mail column, I was very surprised to found our LP - Cover in it. A reader was complaining about his favourite Comic figure being on the cover of a much too loud band with a filthy name. I could understand him since I would probably be just as angry finding my favourite Comic Hero (how's about Achille Talon from Greg?) on Top of a Grateful Dead – LP. But I even more liked your answer. you said: "Actually, the album could have been featured in another column on Trashy Skate – Punk Heavy Metal bands who swiped something without permission from an artist who will let them get away with it because he doesn't want to be viewed as a boring old fart." I can assure you that we will never view you as an old fart, since a boring old fart would propably have gone to the next lawyer and sent us a bill of a few hundred dollars. Thanks, man, for saving us money (which we didn't have anyway).

Actually, we are kind of sorry to having used your figure on our LP-cover without asking you before. The thing is we found the picture in an english music magazine (who propably didn't ask for your permission as well, at least we couldn't find any copyright adresses) and had no idea it was a comic figure. We liked it, since the "Pig" looked very determined and fit quite good to our title "Something to prove". If we had known that it was a figure from a comic we truely would have asked for permission, since

1. I'm a big Comic Fan (mostly french and belguim Comics, but I've suscribed to a few Marvel – serious lately)
2. We just had a case when a Speedmetal band that sells much more than we do (they: about 70,000 per LP, we: not even 10,000) used on of our songs on their new LP without asking for permission

So again: Thanks for your cool rection (better say: non-reaction), and sorry again. Keep up the good work with your comic. I prefer Comics with "real" storys, but the artwork is Phantastic.

Bye,

Beppo

P.S.: Find enclosed our second LP without a cerebus-cover. You'll probably like the Cover more than the Music, so just sell it to some Ontario Punk (he will buy it after having listened to it!) and drink a few beers for the money you get.

P P.S. Sorry for the rather strange english!

I think your rather strange english is just fine.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dad, uh, Dave:

I am *not* smirking honest! I quit my job as Big Bad Editor in Chief, and I'm lying on a beach in South Carolina, browning my body, and enjoying every moment of the exquisitely crafted "Jaka's Story." So, can't I stay up and read a few more chapters? *Puhleeze*?

Still looking for those pesky fnords, even after all these years...

Diana Schutz

Diana, Diana, Diana. I *knew* you'd be the first one to come back from the cesspool. Here's a great big wet sloppy kiss. Mwahhh!

Cootch-Cootch-Cootch.

★★★★★★★★★★

The President,
Cerebus.
Dear Dave,

As the Official Artist for The Other Wankers (the only rock band in Australia to have its own full-time professional artist), and long-time Cerebus fan, imagine my amazement at finding my artwork reproduced in your comic! (Issue #117, Dec.).

Imagine, too, my surprise at the suggestion that you may have been responsible for it!

Of course, a man of your refined taste and sensitivity, not to mention artistic talent, could conceivably have done something similar, but I doubt that you have the cultural heritage necessary to produce my unique "Aussie Wankers" design

Be that as it may, you obviously appreciate the Wank Art/Music concept, so Murgatroyd and I feel you should be in on the ground floor of our North American operations.

"Wank" is an indigenous Australian term and literally means "masturbate". There are far broader meanings however, like:

Wank (n): self indulgence, exaggeration, nonsense

Wanker (n): a pretentious person; one given to flights of fancy.

Like many Australian words, it is generally used as an insult, but can become a term of endearment. Indeed, like the American "Jerk Off", it is so overused by some people that its exactness is in some danger. (Letters like this one help to redefine it).

Wank Music is up-front, challenging and controversial. So is Wank Art. Together they make an exciting audio-visual package with considerable audience appeal. A copy of the Wank Art Colouring Book and an Indonesian pirate quality tape of The Other Wankers 'Music to Masturbate By' are enclosed for your enlightenment. T-shirts bearing the attractive and tasteful "Aussie Wankers" logo (half of which appeared in your article) are also available, and I'm currently designing a cover for TOW's first single, "Masturbate!", which may have trouble with obscenity laws somewheres.

Any of these highly desirable products can be obtained by sending $10 (Canadian, US, NZ, Australian, it doesn't matter), to cover postage and 'handling' to:

The Other Wankers International Marketing Division,
First Floor, Technology House,
49 George St.,
Fitzroy 3065
Victoria,
Australia

Happy Wanking!
Elizabeth Christensen

Thanks so much for 'Wank Art' which I have found to be hours and hours of one-handed fun (especially since I broke up with my girlfriend). It's hard to tell what you look like from the fuzzy photo-copy of the news clipping you sent, but you do have a magnificent profile.

I must come 'down under' sometime (so to speak) and we'll drink some bad wine or something.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'm writing to tell you what it is I like about Cerebus; the smell of the pages. Sure, the story's good. So is the art, damn good, but you just don't get the same kind of smell from an X-men or

Spiderman. I'm serious here. Take a Cerebus, then take an X-men and give each a good sniff. No comparison.

Smile, Dave, God don't hate you.

Richard Smallbone
R.R. #1 Denfield,
Ontario
N0M 1P0

You know.

I read 'God don't hate you' and it was the first time in years I'd considered that that might very well be true.

Thank you.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

What are you going to do around April or May of 1998 (issues 228-229 or so of Cerebus) when Cerebus Bi-weekly will actually catch up and pass the regular monthly Cerebus (if my computations are correct) — I just kind of wanted to know???

T. Scott Benefield/W.A.M.
MTSU P.O. Box A720
Burfreesboro, TN
37132

Gosh.

It's a good thing I've got eight years to think about it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

We are a few narcoleptic psychochemistry majors at St. John's College in Santa Fe. But we also have a minor in Philosophical-Mathematical Dialectics of Linguistics and Music. So we tend to be well versed in all of the classical philosophical positions, as well as some of the well-known deviations. We find *Cerebus* to be a thought-provoking and invaluable supplement to these studies. We're also pleased to be following your efforts to secure the rights of independent comic book creators as well as promote those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to offer their work to fellow artists and readers. These efforts have convinced us (a posteriori) of the close community that exists between you and other artists (Murphy, Zulli, Miller, Sienkiewicz, and Moore) who have forced us to respect them and their talents. On the strength of that connection, imagined or real, we wish to direct a question to you regarding Alan Moore (as we know not where to write him). Did he or did he not, like, write lyrics for Pink Floyd or what? Several of the songs on the "Momentary Lapse of Reason" album were partially credited to an "A. Moore", and it is well known that David Gilmour (never reputed as a great lyricist even though he is one of the greatest rock 'n roll guitarists of all time) was looking for aid in the 'words area' after the rift with Roger Waters. It is also known that Moore has an interest in music and lyrics as shown by "This Vicious Cabaret" in *V for Vendetta* #4. So…is it true? We would like to know and would appreciate your investigation of the matter. We have valued *Cerebus* (everything about it, except for those trite, moronic back cover photos) for years now. You have produced one of the most delicate creations in the field, so continue with our humble gratitude for your efforts. Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Dora
D. Garfield Empie
Jason "turbo" Jeffers
Ronnie "blades of steel" Kaplan
Alan "too tall" Liddel
J. Lawrence Martin
Eric "jackhammer" Poppele
"Robert" Doc Wolberg

I've just rung Alan up because it's one-thirty in the afternoon here which puts England at six thirty or so and what do you think? The line's busy. I'll try again after the next letter, right?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

Just sitting around in my room playing an innocent game of "How Many Furry Things Are There In The Room' when an uncontrollable urge to write gripped me the way a yak might grip one if it wanted to write and it had opposing thumbs. Or maybe it was just indigestion. In any case, as you've probably already noticed, the typewriter is balanced on my lap rather than on the desk, not merely for cheap thrills but because my back hurts, causing the letters to be all bouncy and irregular, which reminds me of yet another game we can play, one into whose details I shall not delve since I've forgotten completely what it was I was talking about. Judging from the way I keep fucking up the typing and from the nonexistent margin, one may assume that the drugs have not yet worn off. Not to worry, I'm very good at faking these things. Ask any one of my two previous bosses. Since, Dave, you are not going to California, I shall. Not that I want to or anything.

Now we can get on to the matter at hand, which is: why is it that my stomach really really hurt for two hours today and then stopped hurting after I ate a turkey sandwich? Some things man was not meant to know. Now, another question. Oh yes, I remember. To whom am I writing again? Ah, Dave Sim. Thank you, Murray. I'm sorry, I really must apologise for my silly behaviour. You see, old friends of the family have resurfaced after years of seemingly being dead and yesterday my uncle actually said to me (no lie), "I think I'll become a zookeeper".

Oh, *Cerebus* #119: I liked it more than Taco Bell. Which is to say, whole bunches. I think that's enough of that. I leave you on this note: how do you know that 'tis really I that wrote this letter and not a two-bit lowdown imposter?

Mike Robbins

I'm not telling (nyahh, nyahh, nyahh nyahh nyahh)!

P.S. Is "lowdown" one word or is there a hyphen?

I'm printing this letter because of the part about eating a turkey sandwich and that's all you needed to stop your stomach from hurting which there was no reason for it to hurt in the first place. I mean, that's *it* you know? That's it *exactly*. Okay let's try Alan again. I'm in the middle of ten seconds of dead air. Mis-dialed maybe. Try again and. A click. Static. Static. Busy again.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I know where Syd Barnett lives.

Sincerely,

Jon Miller
Bard College
Annandale-NY 12504

Oh, hey. Good for you. I tell you what. Let's see if we've got one of those long, flattering jobbies, just in case Alan is using the euphemism or something. And then we'll try him one more time.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I quit buying comics altogether several years ago, about half-way through Church & State. At the time I was supporting a $30-$40/month comic habit sponging off my father, despite the fact I couldn't support myself, and my wife-to-be wanted some proof that I could be a responsible and mature adult. Since I'm not, I did buy a few things in the last few years, the John Byrne maxi-series *Superman*, for instance, and the graphic novel reprint of Miller's *Dark Knight*. But I bought the former at the 7-11 and the latter a B. Dalton's, because I wasn't letting myself go into comic book stores until I had my addiction licked.

Cut to last December. By this time, I had cleaned out my comic collection, selling about 1/4 of it (including almost everything having to do with the letter X) at a loss because when Glenwood went belly up all the comic stores owners around here had a field

day buying their inventory. I had contributed most of the money to the household budget, and I was ready to start back into comics in a conservative way.

Steve at Fantasy Books II let me browse for over an hour, including basically reading the four issues of "Walking on the Moon" on the rack as well as many other things, and nobody even made any snide comments about lending libraries when I bought only *Cerebus* #112-113 and a comic off the quarter table (an old *Moon Knight* which turned out to have a letter mentioning Cerebus – synchronicity, huh?). I paid him back by going back a couple of days later and buying back to 107 (what he had on the shelf) and having *Cerebus* – and only *Cerebus* held for me. I've also bought some other back copies, and my copy of *High Society* arrived a couple of weeks ago. Until I have at least reprints of all the *Cerebus* so far, I'm not buying anything else.

It blew my mind to see Bran Mak Muffin on the floor with the flies in his eye. Especially since I missed #80 the first time and didn't even know he was dead! There are still huge gaps in my version of the story, because after 75 I have 77, 80, 81 and 102, and then I pick up consecutive issues again at 107. As soon as I can afford it, I'm going to get *Church & State II*, and then I'll have the whole story so far, but in the meantime, here are some reactions:

First off, *Jaka's Story* is flat-out incredible, as far above *High Society* as that novel is above *Cerebus* #1. Wow! From my hour or so of skimming at Fantasy Books (not a fair assessment of the competition, I will grant you), I would say that your current work is at least among the best five comics coming out today. And none of the others has been around a dozen years.

It is no longer relevant to talk about whether *Cerebus* is the best comic on the market. You have put yourself on another level entirely. There is little doubt now that you will finish 300 issues, and when you're done you will have produced the first High Tragedy in the format of twenty pages of graphic story every month (more or less).

There have been some great works of art lately that have lifted the notion of "comic books" to an adult level. *Cerebus* has always been in the forefront of this movement, even to the insults in the letter column as you refuse to make any concessions whatsoever to children, even if they are 30 years old and big fans of yours. But up until now comics have been either more-or-less one-shot, graphic novels or "limited series" that represent the state of art at a particular time, or endless repetitions of the same old stuff with just enough innovation to keep it all palatable (re: *Superman, Spider-man*, etc.) in an effort toward immortality. When the end comes, it is at best contrived, as in the graceful way Denny O'Neil tried to lay *Master of Kung Fu* to rest (I know, I know, Doug Moench probably didn't appreciate it – but then Steve Englehart created the character with Jim Starlin, even though Doug is the one you think of when you think of Shang-Chi).

You've already surpassed *MOKF* in number of issues published, since they started with 15. And unlike anybody else who's ever been around long enough for the characters, artist, audience and story to grow and develop together, you have a firm grasp of direction. I'm not saying you've got the next 180 issues plotted out – maybe you do, but that's not what I'm talking about. You've obviously had a general idea where you were headed since you said that *Cerebus* "has a life span of 300 issues." What's going to happen for the next 15 years? Well, he's going to suffer a lot, until he dies alone, unloved and unmourned.

Anybody who thinks knowing this lessens the impact of the tragedy, or loses interest in following the story, might as well leave now. The fact is, we're all going to die. If you feel like knowing the ending makes it not worth sticking around, why don't *you* jump off a cliff? Same reason as *Cerebus*, I guess.

Which is why we care. He's not so different from us, in the end, grey fur and all. But "suspense" is over – the fact is that the form of the story signals the type of ending, and the only suspense is how the details will be worked out. Even if you somehow never heard of Oedipus in this Freudian age, half-way through Sophocles' play you *know* the horrible man the king is looking for, the monster whose crime brought plague upon the city, is going to turn out to be the king himself. Tragedy, like life and death, is inevitable. Only cheap melodrama demands suspense. Do you ever really doubt that the super heroes will save the universe? Will Little Nell really be run over by the train? Even in melodrama, then, the suspense is only apparent.

As a work in progress, the complete *Cerebus* of 300 issues represents a major advance in the graphic story, the first work that will truly bear comparison to Shakespeare and similar figures.

From a 21st Century perspective on comic books, there will be three important events: The Creation of Superman, the Marvel Explosion, and *Cerebus*. Everything else will be remember only by the kinds of fans who revere whatever forgotten names from the 30's and 40's are your favorites. Barry Smith will be remember for having inspired you. Nuts? Ever read any Christopher Marlowe? You may have heard of the "Tragical History of Dr. Faustus," which contains the famous line about Helen of Troy: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/and burnt the topless towers of Illium?" One line and a character who's been rewritten many times. That's all we remember of Kit Marlowe, a man who was *almost* as good as Shakespeare.

Aristotle defined the fascination we all have with tragedy by saying that it gives us a *catharsis*, a word that has had many meanings over the years but in the original Greek meant something like "good heart attack."

You give me a good heart attack, Dave Sim. And nobody else even really tries.

Yes, Virginia, Santa Claus is a figment of your and others' imaginations, comfortable to believe in while you're a child. Whether George's predictions concerning our destiny prove to be overly pessimistic (or overly optimistic – one of the few things that could prevent *Cerebus* #300), in the long run we're all dead. *Cerebus*, this letter, our children, everything we do, is footprints on the moon. Sorry, all you gentle people who wish to be sheltered from reality,but the world is a harsh and lonely place, and Cerebus is going to live only a few years, suffering greatly, until he dies. Alone. Unloved. Unmourned. God know the little bastard deserves it. But then is he so different from the rest of us??

J. Stephen Bolhafner
3509-A Connecticut
St. Louis, MO
63118

I think Barry Windsor-Smith can sleep easy at night knowing that his 'Beguiling' story in Epic Magazine is better than anything ever done in Cerebus. But thank you for your kind words. Okay let's give Alan one more try.

Great! Alan was in and he said to tell you that no he's not the A. Moore on the Pink Floyd album. As far as he knows the guy's name is Anthony Moore, but he's not sure about that. Alan sends his love to everyone and I told him you all say 'Hi'.

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